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Asymmetry in Political Information Processing: Congruency-based reasoning in belief revision and political decision making

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Abstract

In a political environment, people may use information selectively for reasoning and belief updation. We hypothesized that political reasoning is asymmetrical and is triggered only for belief-challenging information. The experiment had three stages. In the first stage, participants were presented with a fictional socio-economic and political background, then they voted on fictional candidates from two competing political parties, and finally rated the parties on how strongly they supported/opposed them. Subsequently, participants were presented with either congruent or incongruent information items and they rated their trust in them. Finally, participants again rated their preference for the political parties. For congruent information, the initial polarization of the participants did not significantly influence their trust rating for the information item, but it did affect their belief update. The effect was reversed for incongruent information. The findings indicate that individuals engage in behaviour that tries to reduce cognitive dissonance when they encounter incongruent information.